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MORNING MEETING

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CARIBBEAN SEMINAR CONTINUES DISCUSSIONS OF DECOLONIZATION ISSUES

The United Nations Caribbean Regional Seminar on decolonization continued this morning outside Bridgetown, Barbados, hearing 11 additional speakers.

The discussion among Government representatives, academicians and representatives of non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations focused primarily on the political aspects of decolonization, with particular reference to the situations of dependent territories in the Caribbean region.

This afternoon, a Drafting Committee will meet in closed session. The seminar will conclude tomorrow, 21 June, when further speakers will be heard and conclusions and recommendations will be adopted for submission to the Special Committee on decolonization.

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For information media—not an official record

Statements made

The first speaker, ALDEN C. DURHAM, leader of the Opposition in Parliament in the Turks and Caicos Islands, described the 1988 Constitution, which he said "was thrust upon us by the British". It invested supreme power in the colonial Governor and enacted a multi-constituency voting system which gave more weight to some persons' votes than to others, and combined island constituencies in a way that put a small island at a political disadvantage. He appealed to the Special Committee on decolonization and other participants to try to persuade the British to allow the Turks and Caicos people to have more input in determining their own future and to reinstate the process of "one person, one vote". He also asked the Special Committee to come and observe the next general elections, to be held in 1992.

ROGER CLARK, Professor of International Law, Rutgers University, questioned the system by which the United Nations classified territories as "Non-Self-Governing" or otherwise. In some instances, including the cases of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, the General Assembly's decisions seemed arbitrary and should perhaps be re-examined. Puerto Rico had also been taken off the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, although it was doubtful whether the criteria for such a removal had truly been met. Given the number of colonial situations still existing, there was reason to consider modifying past decisions and standardizing the criteria on which future decisions were based.

Sister MARY BETH REISSEN (Pax Christi) said that the more than 100,000 deaths in East Timor were indicative of genocide. She deplored human rights violations there and urged the Special Committee to send a visiting mission to meet with Bishop Filipe X. Belo and other Timorese leaders who were seeking a referendum under United Nations auspices. She also recommended that the United Nations prepare a fact sheet on East Timor and update its 1976 decolonization pamphlet on that territory. She expressed grave concern over the continued presence of United States military facilities in Puerto Rico, which threatened Caribbean tranquility and represented a barrier to the development of an autonomous and integrated Caribbean. It was not conducive to a proper climate for an election that would determine the island's future relationship with Washington.

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